The discovery of the *nature-city* and the re-generative strategies

A. Sichenze, I. Macaione & M. I. Insetti
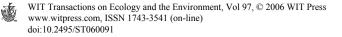*University of Basilicata, Italy*

Abstract

Our study of the *re-generation ability of the Nature-City* began in the second half of the Nineties with the *urbstourism* studies. These studies related to sustainable tourism and were carried out throughout Italy with many varied results. They are now generating a great deal of interest. Reference can be made to our reports presented at the 7th (1997) and 12th (2003) Italian Tourism Report, at the Biennal of Barcelona (2003) as well as at the 1st International Meeting *Matera Nature-City* (2005), in the preliminary acts of the 1st International Meeting on the *Nature-City*. The concept of the *Nature-City* implies matching sustainable tourism to the problems of cultural goods, on the one hand, as well as to the environment and housing matters, on the other.

Our first nature-city strategy focussed on the Sassi in Matera. At the beginning of the Fifties, Matera was an old, deserted Italian town. It was then declared part of the Unesco World Heritage; many of its buildings have now been reconstructed. This first strategy is therefore closely linked to the entrepreneurial idea of the *city-inn,* set within both a natural-archaeological park as well as an urban centre.

Along with this strategy, a further two re-generative ideas are presented. The first focuses on the network of *city-inn park* projects in large countryside-city areas, orientated towards increasing the complexity value as well as the variety of the ecosystems. The second based on metropolitan areas, aims at creating *large parks* of high re-generative density, with an example being the *shore-park* (*seafront-park* or *sea-garden-park*).

We draw conclusions concerning critical evaluation of direct experiences and the study of about 250 examples of *Nature-Cities* worldwide.
Keywords: Nature-City, safeguard, heritage, city-inn, urbstourism, sustainability, re-generating strategy, domestic, centre, nature, island, initial, topic, co-existence, time deepness, landscape, representative.

1 The 7th Italian Tourism Report and the creation of the *Urbstourism* and *City-Inn* formula

The problems of sustainable tourism can be discussed from several different points of view. The macroscopic problem of the unbearability of urban mass tourism is not an ideal starting point. Whereas the idea that nature proposes its own laws of sustainability through its *work and beauty* is, with it being almost impossible to define the *sustainable city*. In contrast, many sustainability conditions can be described through the *Nature-City Principles*.

A group of researchers, guided by Prof. A. Sichenze, has been working on a project for nearly ten years in the Basilicata region in the south of Italy. It is a relatively simple study with the aim of analysing and preserving the so-called *Minor Italian cities*, which (Levine [1]) claims, have an intrinsic sustainability. *Minor Italian cities* can be considered to be those small Italian towns/villages, set in the Apennine mountains, surrounded by nature, in which there are conditions of sustainability but at the same time are falling into decay and are currently depopulated.

Entire villages along with wellbeing criteria, houses, monuments, human and collective institutions, scientific and cultural traditions, disappear not only from culture as well as from the protection of their own inhabitants, but also from the world of the *Nature-City*. Being that this context was predicted ten years ago, a new strategy was needed, based on an endogenous idea of development. Many years have been wasted not only in demonstrating the feasibility of this idea but also to winning over local resistances. It was therefore necessary to conceive a probatory study based on Prof. Sichenze's earlier *culture of limit* theories in a sustainable city (Sichenze [2]). This study was carried out in the Basilicata region in 1996, with the results being published in the 7th Italian Tourism Report (Lavecchia et al. [3]).

A group of relatively unknown small sized towns of Basilicata was used as a sample. The initial results showed that the *Urbsturism and City-inn* formula could be applied, with the tourist regeneration of buildings being possible, subsequently creating a lasting activity on the tourist market if certain conditions were present. The most important conditions included a strong innovation connected to sustainability, with particular reference to the creation of a new form of tourism far removed from the traditional, conventional and crowded one currently existing as well as the planning of a special, particular type of hospitality that requires houses, landscapes and *co-existentiality: more landscape than city and more houses than inns*.

Urbstourism, otherwise known as *Nature-City* world tourism, could be seen as a particular type of rural tourism. Rural tourism takes advantage of the resources readily available in the country. *Urbstourism* identifies and develops most of the wellbeing resources of the *Nature-City*, revealing them through a *discovery practice* thus becoming part of a cultural and environmental heritage. *Urbstourism* triggers off a hidden knowledge process, included in the know-how of the *Nature-City*, the *true gift* of cultural heritage. The knowledge process has its own *ecological* task, to give *time* back to everyday human life.

This can be achieved by giving people the possibility to spend their holidays in regenerated places, ancient nature-cities now known as *city-inns*. By doing so, *Urbstourism* not only becomes an economic engine, capable of starting the regenerative processes within the *Nature-City,* but also a way of transforming traditional economic activities (building trade and agriculture) into a tourist and bio-construction economy.

In a competitive world, the *city-inn* has to have knowledge of its own resources and know-how of hidden potentialities in order to preserve itself as well as the complexity of its own resources. The *city-inn* could be therefore defined as a *Nature-City* ecosystem, with the aim of saving energy as well as reduce the production of waste materials.

Similar to a biological ecosystem, the *city-inn* has to learn to how to absorb negative impacts, in order to repair itself, as well as sustain unexpected events, to regenerate natural resources and…Time.

2   Research originality: from the study of Italian small towns to the discovery of the *Nature-City* worldwide

The *Nature-City* world is much larger than the mere existence of ancient urban centres set in the Apennines. The definition of *Nature-City* does not refer only to depopulating medieval hill-structure settlements but also to the complex combination of an old town centre, a large natural entity (woods, seas, rivers, lakes, mountains, parks), archaeological sites and areas of ecological conversion. The *Nature-City* is the *entity* that, starting from an urban centre, spreads itself, assuming the form of a *poli-centrality*.

The very same *process* can be noted in several periods during history including, the 2nd century B.C. in Greece, during the emperor Adriano's reign in Villa Adriana in Tivoli, in Berlin during the 1920s, in Le Corbusier Unités d'Habitations plan and the Chandigarh project, as well as in the German Siedlungen. Not taking into account standard languages and styles, the same structure can also be found not only on a smaller scale in Basilicata but also in several Italian territories, as well as in entire world regions too.

Analyzing several settlement types of different dimensions, in various geographical locations and with different ages (Macaione [4,6]; Sichenze [5]), it can be noted that the *Nature-City* conditions also exist in the metropolis where they become even more interesting. This is one of the most original features of this study.

In conclusion, *Nature-City* is so called because its relationship with nature and civilization is the basis of its existence, and in particular of its physical structure**.** In its initial structure, there is a strong, dominant natural entity (a river, a lake, the sea, a forest, a mountain or a gorge, etc.) and an inhabited centre closely linked to this natural element. Then both the entity and the centre will evolve together. The elements of ecological quality (the mutual dependence, the diversification, the complexity, the cyclic nature of processes and streams of

information, the contextual conditions, for example) are then combined with human experience and cultural heritage (notions of knowledge, culture, value, richness genealogy, learning ability, etc.).

A *paradigm of ten categories* has been drawn up, including domesticity, centrality, naturalness, insularity, initiality, topicity/topicality, co-existentiality, time deepness, landscapeness, representativeness in order to communicate, understand and narrate the inner characteristics of the *Nature-City*, from both economic and cultural perspectives. The *Nature-City* can then be divided into two distinct and consequential phases. The first refers to the *Nature-City* as an object of consciousness using direct, instinctive and recurring perceptions. This discovery is a *cultural good* in itself. It is a historical and social process, as highlighted by the restoration of the Sassi in Matera.

In the second phase, the discovery of the *Nature-City* becomes the discovery of a wider event, linked to the consciousness, analysis, description and construction of its applications. The discovery value is coherently preserved in its own lasting abilities and its own re-generating tools.

3   The strategy of the *Nature-City* tourist ecosystem

When referring to sustainable tourism, a tourist ecosystem can be defined as a connection between the tourists, tour operators, inhabitants and natural capitals. Therefore, as an ecosystem, the subject of this study has its own ordered and rational structure, as well as functions of an inner relationship and outer exchanges, with it requiring all these in order to reach an ever-new balance.

Unfortunately tourist and complex urban ecosystems need technical and bureaucratic controls of its carrying capacity, with self-reliant instruments therefore being needed.

The *sustainable strategy of development* aims at developing the re-generating conditions of the *nature-city*, human institution and nature, through the precise planning of analysis, actions and controls based on sustainable principles.

At the 5th Biennial of Towns & Town Planners in Europe (Sichenze [7]), a general strategy was proposed by this research group, in which several tools are used to regenerate small towns with tourist intentions (*city-inn*) creating a virtuous economic regeneration circle of endogenous resources value, a type of chain-innovation for different sectors that is used to strengthen the ecological line within sustainable buildings.

The strategy of the *Nature-City* development is limited but complete, defining itself in all the operational connections, from basic research, to reference models, intervention methods, technological structures, training and news. All the elements with a defined planning of their own called *Nature-City World*.

The tourist demand of this world had to be studied in order to try to understand if it is possible to live in such a world.

In the 12th Italian Tourism Report (Lavecchia et al. [8]), this research group studied the balance of every tourist experience regarding widespread hospitality and how to operate in the *Nature-City* World. These experiences are called:

Town-inn, *House-inn*, *Charming house*, *Country house* (Dall'Ara and Marongiu [9]) or *Bed & Breakfast*, *Rural Tourism*, *Cultural Goods Tourism*, *Park Tourism*, *Urbstourism*, *City-inn and City-Network*.

Particular cities and sites, far from usual destinations, can evoke *a world*, not only the *Nature-City* World, suitable for the above-mentioned kinds of tourism and receptivity (Newsweek, 22nd of July, 2002).

The difficulties connected to these forms of tourism were easily perceived, which, along with industrialization in southern Italy, risked failing due to wrong political strategies (Macaione and Sichenze [10]).

Every single type of *Nature-City* tourist hospitality currently lacks any form of normative rules and coordination. In particular, the *whole tourist ecosystem* is lacking a liaison network, of which the basic nodes can be considered: cultural goods, environment, tourism and ecology.

Several ideas regarding the *Nature-City* restoration with tourist intention can therefore be proposed.

These proposals result from direct experience and were developed with the consciousness that two distinct levels of action are needed. The first one is aimed at satisfying specific economic groups' interests. It would require a relationship with strong political and economical power on either side, which is normally used for any type of cultural plan in order to gain only the funding, thus emptying the *Nature-City* world of its real meaning as well as of its most innovative aspects. The second one, characterized by a *weaker force* and longer, slower actions, is aimed at a cultural project and has to be able to survive on lesser means, using only the territory's cultural and natural capital.

The second level of this strategy is the most important for the *Nature-City* project. It has to teach the city how to heal the damage done by the first level.

The most original aspect of this strategy is that it is coordinated in two different but contemporary scenarios, an optimistic one, based on the XXI century civilization, in which the politics and the economies of the new strategies succeed in a political plan and a net economy.

The other is a pessimistic one, a plan B, trying to acquire minimum targets in order to survive in protracted periods of time.

According to this scenario, a regenerating-resilient strategy reveals itself in two directions. One of technological innovation and image-change, the other of selection of the endogenous ecological and bio-constructive resources of the territory, which have to help during the difficult moments in the development of the city.

Are there any examples of this kind of strategy being successful that could be used as a practical reference?

4   Matera: the *Nature-City* regenerating strategy through the *City-inn*

The most interesting example of this regenerating strategy is the environmental and architectural rescue of the Sassi in Matera. This can describe several phases of the *Nature-City* regeneration. Matera is infact being regenerated into a new

form of housing, through the creation of new cultural places as well as widespread hospitality. These ways of re-generating, combined with the environment, the archaeology and the city structure, give origin to a *City-Inn,* where *Urbstourism* can be applied, in other words, tourism in *the Nature-City world*.

Matera can be considered to be one of the most representative examples of a city where tourism is very close to an idea of sustainable development depending on inner factors linked to both buildings and nature. Matera succeeded due to it changing the destiny of a dying city by remaining a *Nature-City*. It is now a symbol. How many cities in the world have been regenerated in their nature as well as in civilization? A lot of cities have been reconstructed, for example those bombed or theatres of natural disasters. But from the lowest shame of it's history which city has been able to recover, and how? Only Berlin has done so much!

The regeneration processes of Matera and Berlin were obviously based on different situations. The subhuman life conditions present in the historical centre of Matera in the Sassi, in opposition with an extraordinary human and environmental landscape. From the early Fifties, Matera has demonstrated to have an ecosystem of its own. A self-reliant structure, with regenerative functions and the ability to make exchanges with the outside world.

This paper cannot describe how Matera and the Sassi became part of the UNESCO world heritage but can only summarize the discoveries of the Matera strategy. First of all, the *city of the Sassi* has all the regenerating functions that are required of the objectives of a sustainability strategy and that restrain (and contain) the limits, as well as the limits of integrity. For this reason the houses, which are the basic entities of a city, have been regenerated through the contact with both the depth of the earth and the openness of the landscape, so that the *value of the whole* overcomes the sum of its parts.

The accommodation facilities, in this process, turned into *residential domesticity,* as an expression of care and adjustment toward the stability of human institutions in traditions.

The resulting *city-inn* is a complex system of diffused accommodation facilities (bed & breakfast, five stars hotels, beautiful mansions, etc.), and of places of knowledge and tastes belonging to a new *taste economy*. This *city-inn* realizes a *topicity* of *slow-spots* (which encourage people to stop), rich of ethnic, eco-cultural and gastronomic varieties continuously regenerating and creating a world, connecting the different habitats of the *insularity* of which a city is made up of. These places work in the city as connective tools of scenarios of the *insularity*. Domesticity thus becomes the engine for *co-existentiality*, increasing possibilities and life styles, uncovering inner resources and encouraging external (foreign) exchanges, all typical features of the city's own nature.

In Matera, the variety of tourist offers and housing is matched to the historical urban centre as bio-diversity is to the *gorge*, which is the *natural historical centre* of the city. Among these two centres the operators of exchanges in the ecosystem of the Nature-City can be found: the birds (hawks, buzzards, swallows, doves, etc.). They make the environment alive and increase the regenerating ability of the *landscapeness*.

Eyesight can be used as a *coup d'oeil* to search the *whole* of the landscape, in order to build a net of visibility between the seven known view-spots as well as other, hidden, ones. Through this *coup d'oeil* the city discloses *time deepness*, showing its archaeological sites, ruins, museums, parks, in wider visions of the historical dimension, in which everyone in the city can participate.

The narrative culture therefore regenerates itself and becomes *representativeness*.

The *Nature-City* of Matera is in possession of inner tourist sustainability due to the existence of an archaeological naturalistic park (the Murge), as well as its architectural stratilogicity and urban landscape. These basic parts are so closely tied together that they are inclined at a deeper mutual connection, at times completing each other, while at others limiting each other.

5   Other examples of the *Nature-City* regenerating strategy: the *archipelago* strategy and the *immersion* strategy

The *archipelago* strategy comes from the idea that the whole tourist ecosystem is comparable with a net where the nodes are towns and small cities and the network is the mutual exchange connection. These nodes are like *praesidia* (islands) of *insularity*. The force of this strategy is the realization of a *park-system* of resources and reciprocity that can contain the negativity and allow inner resources to increase in their value.

This strategy is aimed at creating *cities*, not villages, with their own services and cultural richness. It also aims at multiplying the relations between the city and its countryside as a form of *policentricity*.

The experience of a journey into a network of cities proposed by *Urbstourism*, is more typical of a *traveller* rather than of a tourist, of someone moved by the spirit of searching, someone who wants to find and explore a new possibility of connections between rare goods, activities, ecosystems sometimes distant, but all with the same *brand-image* in common.

In the strategy of the network, where products and services are not near to hand, in order to have the positive effect of the *Nature-City* brand on the sale of every good belonging to the same concept of eco-sustainability, all the single centres, as nodes of the net, need to function together as an ecosystem.

In this ecosystem the single urban-rural centres have to be limited in their potential, while they have to give more value to each other, and not only to their products, therefore creating what can be called an *insular world*.

In a *Nature-City* network, the regenerating structure, linking the archipelago to its inner world as well as to the external one, is a *Park*, based on the idea of a self-sustainable connected ecosystem.

This theory, proposed at the 7th EC Conference (Sichenze [11]) requires the support of a narrative system capable of showing the *Nature-City*'s cultural heritage.

The eco-museum is a narrative system application and any further development of it is a *Nature-City* tourist park, called Alétheia, with the archipelago strategy being tested in an *open laboratory*.

The third regenerative strategy of the *Nature-City,* known as the *immersion* strategy, is not a discovery-strategy, it is aimed at finding sustainability based on a cultural and environmental heritage already existing within the territory.

It is the ecological conversion of an area characterised by a highly unbearable urban situation, and it is aimed at creating a natural wellness island in which to be completely immersed, run, swim or just lie in the sun.

Some clear examples are natural parks, that can be found in great cities such as Berlin, New York, Rome, Washington, Chicago, Boston, Varanasi, or more recent seafront rescues of cities like Salerno and Palermo, in the South of Italy.

Work is currently being carried out on this third strategy in a seashore-park project, characterized by a tourist ecosystem typical of a *Nature-City* with architectural, ecological and bioclimatic nodes.

The principles of the three strategies can be summarized as follows: in the *City-Inn* strategy (Matera, *Nature-City* strategy) there is the economic idea of a new concentration and integration between housing and tourist accommodation facilities.

In the *archipelago* strategy, there is the idea of a network of *places, products and activities (services)*, referring to a polycentric network that helps the transformation.

Finally, in the *immersion* strategy, there is a new typical centrality of regenerating flows, supported by bio-building innovation.

The first one seems to be the winning strategy when considering that Matera evolved from an *unlikely city* as claimed by F.S. Nitti said to a *farther city.* A symposium was held in Matera in 2005 relating to this concept, (Matera, *Nature-City*), in which the paradigmatic evolution of Matera from *rural culture capital* to *Nature-City capital* in the world was discussed.

The archipelago strategy seems to be the most interesting economic strategy if it could manage to overcome local pride and individualism as well as successfully reform current economic policy.

The immersion strategy is the most diffused one, being successfully applied to urban areas, but not really satisfying the needs of the countryside.

6 The regenerating strategy objective-functions of the *Nature-City*

Following the first results, a more critical analysis is required. In order to reach a deeper sustainability, the three strategies should be combined, using the *Nature-City's* own functional ways. The study of these functional ways was particularly difficult, especially to theorize and communicate to the scientific community, with it being summarized in the *paradigm of ten categories of the Nature-City existence forms and identitary features,* presented in Prague.

The basic *objective-functions* of the *Nature-City* strategies are now described.

First of all, *Nature-City* has to have an *attractive force,* including the possibility to build. While contemporarily demonstrating a *rare flow centrality* that leads to the ecologic re-conversion of productions and spreads the sustainable use of resources.

Subsequently, in all accommodation facilities a domestic lifestyle should be identified, by which the *traveller* might feel the so-called *feeble strengths* (attention, love, for example), possibly perceiving *domesticity* as an element of confidence, looking for a deeper re-balance of his own energies. This way of travelling shows the evidence of a self-sustainable relationship between *the house* and *the Nature-City* (in the world and in time).

In the *Nature-City*, the relationship with the environmental elements (the sun, the wind, the rain, etc.) and with a recognizable natural entity (the wood, the sea, the river, the lake, the gorge, the mountain, etc.) is identified with *the naturalness* which fosters the enjoying of *Global Common Goods*.

The tourist ecosystem of the *Nature-City* is an *island between islands*, an *insularity*.

Finally, if a City has a continuous will of *going beyond*, an everlasting wish of overcoming the limits, then it is a *Nature- City*. In opposition there is the *spread-city* − decline of the *market-city* – in which disordered and unlimited phenomena rule.

The *Nature-City* has to be *disclosed* rather than *built*.

Today, cities are *spread-cities* with all their negative features, so there is a need for the re-generation and re-conversion of the city in the *Nature-City* through the disclosure of its potential of becoming a *Nature-City* again (as they were at the time of their foundation). At the same time, human masses, bombed by a disordered, uncontrollable, *aggressive strength*, need the attraction for the *Nature-City feeble strength*.

The *Nature-City* contains the strategic idea of a cultural heritage, which gives back a *human time* to people, in order to disclose the cultural heritage of every *Nature-City*.

This discovery is traceable in museums, in *time use policy* (in particular for women), in slow-place projects and in holiday time.

Therefore the *Nature-City* is a resource capable of combining the city's wealth and complexity (diversity) with nature. A Bank of Natural Capitals and Urban Civilization Stock. A past and future memory bank.

In the second half of the last century, starting from the sustainability idea as a future guarantee, Architectures of the *Nature-City* have deposits of human knowledge forms that allow human beings to be in contact with *Nature*.

Past culture could therefore be handed down by the environment only if there will be a safeguard of the *future of the environment*.

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